

## **SOFTWARE REVIEW: TACOPS**

# ***Play It for Fun Or to Enrich Training***

**TACOPS** by Major I.L. Holdridge (Ret.), Arsenal Publishing, Reston, Virginia, 1996, IBM 3.5" version 1.0.3 for Windows. \$44.95.

*TACOPS* is a detailed and accurate simulation of contemporary ground combat. The player can assume the role of a U.S., Canadian, or "OPFOR" commander. There are 27 scenarios, including a "Basic Training" tutorial designed to familiarize you with game mechanics. Each scenario has up to a dozen computer opponent strategies. The *TACOPS* database includes 150 unit types and 100 weapons systems. You can access unit and weapon information, including effective ranges, armor penetration, and photos, via pull-down windows.

*TACOPS* is played in turns that represent one minute of real time. There is an Orders Phase and a Combat Phase in each turn. During the Orders Phase you use point-and-click windows to issue orders. The unit orders window is the heart of the game. Some possible orders include: establishing waypoints for movement, loading and unloading troops, firing smoke grenades, establishing unit SOPs for actions on contact, setting weapons engagement ranges, setting direct-fire TRPs, setting engagement priority by unit type, resupplying units, splitting or joining units of the same type, and naming units.

Orders can be copied from unit to unit for ease of play in larger scenarios. You can have the unit demonstrate its orders to see if it's going to do exactly what you intended.

After you issue orders to your units, click on "Begin Combat" to start the Combat Phase. Both sides carry out orders in four 15-second pulses. The graphics and sound effects during combat are realistic: ATGM launches provide signatures; artillery smoke lingers on the battlefield; and each weapon has its own unique sound, down to the M203 Grenade Launcher. The effects of combat are also realistic, ranging from suppression, infantry casualties by soldier, near-miss, hit but not damaged, mobility or weapons damage, to vehicle or infantry unit destroyed.

*TACOPS* can be played solitaire or against the computer (only as the U.S. or Canada), "hotseat," by e-mail, on a network, or by modem. Custom scenarios can be generated using the ten existing maps. Nine of the maps are in a woodland setting, and one is repre-

sentative of Germany. Future expansion releases will include terrain from the National Training Center, Bosnia, and other possible deployment areas.

Purely as a computer simulation, *TACOPS* is great game. The user interface is intimidating at first, but the tutorial provides a solid foundation of understanding for future games. The 226-page user's manual provides a wealth of information. Over 100 pages of the manual are devoted to designer's notes, frequently asked questions, tables of organization and equipment, and tactical hints. Arsenal Publishing has its own web site for product information, software help, and comments and questions. Responses are prompt, often answered by Major Holdridge himself. Also available on-line are maps, scenarios, and a *TACOPS* demo game.

As a military simulation, *TACOPS* has unlimited training potential. As an Advanced Course student, I have designed scenarios to support battalion staff exercises. Using only one computer, the company commanders are at the terminal, and the battalion commander and staff are in a nearby "TOC." The groups communicate via radios or land line. This separation promotes reporting by the companies and battle-tracking by the staff. A *TACOPS* scenario can be modified to accommodate whatever task organization you want to simulate. Using this method, the computer can play the OPFOR, or the game can be generated from scratch, which requires a human opponent to play the OPFOR. The complete tactical decision-making process can be exercised, and the staff gets to see how the plan fares in execution.

*TACOPS* is a realistic simulation that is an enjoyable game. If you purchase it and do nothing else but play it as a game, it will be money well spent. If you want to apply some creativity to your unit training program, *TACOPS* can easily help. If I bought only one computer game this year, it would be *TACOPS*. I have a feeling my microarmor will be gathering dust for a long time to come!

*TACOPS* is available direct from Arsenal Publishing (703-742-3801.) You can download the game demo from the Arsenal home page on America Online at Keyword: Arsenal, or on the World Wide Web at <http://www.arsenalpub.com>.

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